

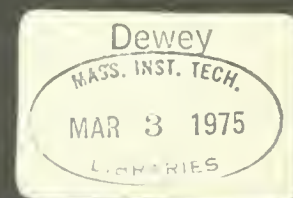




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ALFRED P. SLOAN SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT

ORGANIZATIONS--  
A Political Perspective and Some Implications

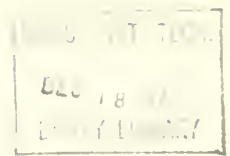
by  
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WP 751-74

November, 1974

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The recent books by Allison (1972) and Baldrige (1972) and the set of articles by Pfeffer (1974), Hickson et al. (1974), and Patchen (1974) suggest that serious sustained consideration is being given to organizations viewed as political systems. For the purposes of this paper, politics will refer to the structure and process of the use of authority and power to effect definitions of goals, directions, and major parameters of the social system (Wamsley and Zald, 1973, p. 18). This political orientation takes power, its distribution, dynamics, and control as central organizational issues. Decision making is seen to take place among differentially powerful interest groups engaged in strategies and negotiations within mixed motive contexts. While there are many conceptual, theoretical, and empirical problems with the development of a political perspective, it is a start in the development of what Allison (1971) terms an alternative conceptual lens.

The premise of this paper is that this kind of conceptual development is important for organizational analysts. The political perspective can be seen as a logical deduction of systems thinking that has been resisted at theoretical and application expense, especially as a wider range of more complex organizations are considered. The unit of analysis for this paper is the organization. Conceptual clarity at this level of analysis is important since assumptions (usually implicit) of organizational processes must influence research and application projects at the individual, small group, intergroup, and extra-organizational levels. (Argyris, 1972, makes a similar point for clarifying one's assumptions of man.) This paper will present a view of the theoretical and social issues that have acted to resist the development of this political approach, as well as theoretical perspectives that have led to a consideration of this alternative approach. Then assuming that the political approach has merit, some implications will be discussed.

#### Paradigm development: An approach to organizations and conflict

A basic assumption of this paper is that much of the thinking and research done in and on organizations has been paradigm constrained.





Paradigmatic values and interests have been antithetical to political developments. More specifically, Kuhn (1970) and Allison (1971) have emphasized the influence of paradigms on the development of science. These broad frameworks provide structure and direction to the progress of science in that they legitimate clusters of assumptions and categories that are defined as problematical, give rules for evidence and its collection, and influence what "good" answers look like. These conceptual lenses then provide investigators with a cognitive map of their field with rules and regulations for traveling in scientific space.

The study of organizations is not without its dominant paradigmatic elements (Pugh, 1966; Perrow, 1972). While not as developmentally mature as in other sciences, there are basic trends, developed during the 1945-1960 period, that do pervade the literature. Organizations are typically seen as internally integrated, rationally coordinated, hierarchical, and goal oriented in nature. Even with systems thinking, a definition accurately reflecting this dominant view of organizations can be taken from Schein (1970, p. 9): "An organization is the rational coordination of the activities of people for the achievement of some common explicit purpose or goal, through the division of labor and function, and through a hierarchy of authority and responsibility (my emphases)." The emphasis here is on goal oriented, rational, and while not stated in Schein's definition, cooperation (Parsons, 1956). Conflict, disharmony, and the notion of ongoing organizational processes were not considered important issues. As Kuhn notes (1970), paradigms are resistant to change, especially when widespread, not only in the academic community but also in the practitioner community. In the behavioral sciences, paradigm stability is strengthened by the effect of business and government on research and application (Weick, 1969). Needless to say, the academicians' values of cooperation and harmony, with business's emphasis on hierarchy, goals, and production, along with a lack of openness to studies dealing with conflict or of decision making processes in situ (eg., Dalton, 1959), did not support the development of a political approach to organizations.

This does not say that there was no attention to conflict during that paradigm development period. It does say, though, that research on



intergroup conflict (eg., Kornhauser, 1962; Sherif, 1952; Deutsch, 1949; and Whyte, 1951) typically took organizational goals as unproblematic. A good example of this is the union-management cooperation reported by Whyte as human relation skills were increased at the plant such that the antagonists eventually recognized their commonality of goals. Most other studies of organization behavior did not take the organization as the unit of analysis and thereby concentrated on intergroup behavior independent of organizational processes (e.g., small, short-term groups) or on dyadic conflict independent of group or organizational processes (e.g., French and Raven, 1968). With very few exceptions (e.g., Blau, 1964; Dalton et al., 1968), studies that did take the social system as the unit of analysis did not pursue conflict and its dynamics beyond the intra-group level without the use of superordinate goals (e.g., Homans, 1950; Sherif, 1952; Kornhauser, 1962). (It should be noted that some Americans, e.g., Dalton, 1959; Dalton et al., 1968; Coser, 1956, and many British, e.g., Sheppard, 1954; Burns, 1961, were not in this cooperative dominated paradigm.)

#### Systems analysis: An approach to systems and conflict

Pre 1960, most organizational thought and research was internally oriented. With the 1960's came systems theory and the notion that social systems could not be viewed in isolation. Organizational input, throughput, and output processes as they impacted and were effected by the environment became important research considerations (e.g., Katz and Kahn, 1966; March and Simon, 1958; Thompson, 1967). Systems theory also made the organization itself more complicated than previously seen. Systems theory emphasized internal differentiation into subsystems each with task and hierarchy specialization. This specialization, resulting in differential cognitions, realities, and rationalities, can be seen to generate two basic strains of conflict in organizations which can be termed vertical and horizontal. Vertical conflict arises from status, hierarchy, mobility, and career differences (e.g., Dahrendorf, 1959; Burns and Stalker, 1965), while horizontal conflict arises from organizational specialization by task (e.g., Landsberger, 1961; March and Simon, 1958). Given systems logic, these two strains of conflict



are inherent in organizations. They can be moderated but not eliminated. Thus the advent of systems analysis was theoretically adverse to the notion of goal congruence (or even goals at all) and cooperation at the organizational level of analysis (Georgiou, 1973). However, these internally oriented implications were not pursued. Instead, the environment and its impact on the organization became a major theoretical and research area during the 1960's. With the exception of the short-lived Cyert and March (1963) research, the systems implications were not brought to bear on intra-organizational behavior.

#### Inter-organizational analysis (Organization-environment relations)

Stimulated by Katz and Kahn (1966), Thompson (1967), and Lawrence and Lorsch (1967), there has been much empirical work on organization-environment relations often phrased in political terms. For instance, given a set of assumptions dealing with uncertainty and dependency as antithetical to organizations, Thompson (1967) has developed a set of propositions and organizational strategies for dealing with reducing technological and environmental dependence by various design, competitive, and cooperative strategies. The thrust of his design strategies involve organizational decisions regarding internal coordination costs and boundary spanning activities. In dealing with the environment, Thompson (pp. 32-38) hypothesized, and Pfeffer (1973, 1974) and Hickson et al. (1974) have studied, a number of alternatives including: competitive strategies of (a) maintaining environmental alternatives, (b) seeking prestige, and (c) seeking power relative to those they are dependent upon; and cooperative (collusive) strategies of bargaining, coopting, and coalitions. The cooperative strategies have been termed negotiated environments. In this fashion, analysts have recognized the strategic importance of the task environment and have conceptualized and studied this organization-environment activity, using an inter-organization framework, in political terms. Industrial organizations (Pfeffer, 1973; Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967), medical centers (Hagedorn and Dunlop, 1971), universities (Baldridge, 1971), hospitals (Pfeffer, 1973), and public agencies (Turk, 1973; Warren, 1967) have been studied using this environment oriented





inter-organization analysis. While there is much equivocal and contradictory in this research (see review by Hunt and Osborn, 1974), the point is that there has been much systematic work being done at the inter-organization level of analysis. However, organization analysts have to date stopped short of following their inter-organizational and systems thinking through. For instance, Thompson (1967) and Child (1972) recognize the political behavior at the organization level of analysis, yet both treat the organization itself as a black box controlled by what they term dominant coalitions or what Hage and Dewar (1973) call the organizational elite. In short, the internal implications of systems analysis have yet to be taken seriously. This has been the case even with numerous case studies emphasizing the political-conflict nature of organizations (e.g., Dalton, 1959; Dalton et al., 1968; Crozier, 1964, 1973; Strauss, 1962; Bucher, 1970; Wildavsky, 1964). Given the pervasive paradigmatic values of integration, superordinate goals, and cooperation at the organization level of analysis, a shift in emphasis recognizing conflict and bargaining as inherent organizational processes has made little progress in the organizational literature.

#### Intra-organizational analysis: Towards a political perspective

The logic for this shift in emphasis is straightforward. Given the conceptual development of the organization as an open system in constant commerce with its multifaceted task environment, the organization can itself be subdivided into a number of subsystems which are mutually interdependent (Katz and Kahn, 1966; Schein, 1970). In general, the subsystems are not equally powerful. Each subsystem (e.g., production, R & D) develops its own set of norms, roles, and values to justify its required activities and continued growth (Katz and Kahn, pp. 84-109). Further, as Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) point out, each of these subsystems has its own task environment to cope with. In this way, the organization can be conceived of as a system with multiple goals and objectives that involve multiple interactions between differentially powerful units internal to the organization (this can be seen as the internal environment), and interactions between the units and their relevant external task environments. This conception of the organization as made up of competing and interdependent subsystems with status and





power differentially distributed is the basis for the horizontal and vertical strains of conflict described earlier. These two kinds of conflict suggest that organizational stability is the exception rather than the rule. This internal instability is further heightened by changes in the technology or the task environment of the sub-units. Given this instability, it follows that "the organization" has meaning only in the very short run and that a more appropriate concept is what Weick (1969) calls organizing. This gives explicit recognition to internal and external processes that continually redefine "the organization."

With the assumptions of subsystem development and dynamic, the set of assumptions used earlier to describe organizational response to environmental dependence can be brought to this internal analysis. That is, sub-units move to decrease their internal dependence through cooperative, competitive, and structural strategies (e.g., Crozier, 1964; Dalton, 1959; Sapolsky, 1972). In this way organizations can be seen as patterns of interaction between subgroups as they aim to decrease intra-organizational dependence within potentially flexible constraints posed by their task, their task environment, and the organization's structure. Within an exchange framework, decisions are then made by the bargaining and dealings of subgroups. Different decisions will be of differing importance to the various subgroups and will set into motion internal haggling eventually resulting in what Child (1972) and Thompson (1967) term strategic decisions. The dominant coalition (i.e., cliques that evolve to make the decisions) will not in general be the same over issue areas, nor is it likely to be stable even over similar issue areas given environmental instability (e.g., Warwick, mimeo). These kinds of processes have been discussed by Cyert and March (1963) and Katz and Kahn (1966). Cyert and March discuss sequential attention to goals and quasi-resolution of conflict, while Katz and Kahn (1966) see conflict as regulated through the dynamic of compromise and accommodation. They write:

...it is much easier for management to meet conflicts on a day to day basis, making concessions first to one part of the organization, then to another part, than it is to attempt the thorough reorganization which abstract logic might dictate. The alteration of concessions in response to the mobilization of forces means that organizations often jolt along and move by jerks and jumps (p. 95).



Whatever the term, quasi-resolution of conflict or the dynamic of compromise, the processes that result in the "jerks and jumps" are the outputs of political processes carried out at the subsystem level of analysis.

With this view of organizations, internal organizational relationships cannot be fully described with the paradigmatic values of cooperation, super-ordinate goals, and open communications. Intra-organizational analyses must be supplemented with a sensitivity to conflict over values and goals as well as over scarce resources. The conflict does not go on unchecked; it is regulated and constrained by task, structural, and environmental constraints in a process characterized by bargaining, negotiation, and other strategies found in mixed motive situations (see Goffman, 1969). In short, a political perspective is needed to understand internal as well as external organizational activities.

### Summary and Review

Over the past 20 years the study of behavior at the organizational level of analysis has gone from an internal-cooperative oriented phase to an externally dominated systems oriented view. The paper has argued from systems theory and environmental logic as well as from a utility point of view that effort should be given to bring the systems-process oriented perspective inside the organization. Indeed, the political perspective argues that the direct source of organizational variability, both structurally and behaviorally, comes from processes and coalitions internal to the organization. This view does not deemphasize the effect of the environment or technology, but rather brings these variables to the levels where they actually come into play. If this internal perspective has merit, then it is necessary to go beyond the dominant paradigmatic values and assumptions and to begin to explicitly investigate what goes on inside organizations.

If one is interested in the underlying organizational processes as the primary source of organizational behavior, and if the distribution of scarce internal resources involve power, authority, and differential decision making, then organizations are indeed political systems (Dahl, 1970; Sapolsky, 1972). One marvels at how long this perspective has



been ignored. The political perspective emphasizes the interdependence of organized systems with power, bargaining, compromise, and conflict over organizational goals, values, and strategies as inherent and thereby important processes (Perrow, 1972; Cyert and March, 1963; Allison, 1971; Baldrige, 1971). With this analysis, the analyst must focus on how decisions, at all organizational levels, get made; for it is the pattern of internal decisions, deals, and bargains that eventually move the organization.

With this political perspective comes its own conceptual lens and perceptual filters. Conflict is inherent in the system whose social structure is seen as pluralistic, fractured by subgroups with their divergent interests. With this perspective, decision making is seen as one characterized by bargaining and negotiation as the interest groups with their parochial priorities and perceptions vie for organizational control. In all, organizations are seen as mixed motive games with organizational behavior as a political resultant: political in the sense that the activity from which decisions emerge is characterized by compromise, accommodation, and bargaining among individuals and groups with diverse interests and unequal influence; resultant in the sense that what happens is not necessarily chosen as a solution to a problem, but may rather result from compromise, collusion, and confusion (e.g., Baldrige, 1971; Allison, 1971).

### So What

From the process oriented approach described above, it follows that if organizations are differentiated and/or if the organization's task environment is differentiated and not stable, then a potentially fruitful way of conceptualizing the organization is as a political system. If so, then conflict, compromise, negotiation, bargaining, and other behaviors characteristic of mixed motive situations are important organizational processes to be understood. Since only an orientation to the problem has been presented here, strict definitions of political, power, and conflict have not been needed. If this perspective is found to be useful, then the problem of specifying operational definitions and a theoretical framework becomes very important. The further development of this approach and,





more importantly, its utility, await further work. Assume, however, that this political perspective does have merit; what difference does it make? If the political perspective is different from other organizational frameworks, then it should lead to different emphases, concepts, explanations, and predictions. It should make a difference in the theoretical-empirical arena as well as in application areas. This final section will be divided into theoretical and application oriented areas, and assuming the political perspective's utility, will speculate on some implications of the approach.

### Theoretical implications

The emphasis of the political perspective is on organization level processes that arise from inter-unit behavior. However, much of the intra-organizational research has not been attuned to these emergent processes. Much of the social psychological research has not been process oriented above the sub-unit level (Silverman, 1971), or has concentrated on the study of small, short-term lab groups, or has studied individuals or small groups independent of organization level processes.

If organizing is taken as patterns of interactions (of whatever unit) that reoccur over time, then the political perspective calls for more process oriented research at the organizational level of analysis. This process perspective requires greater emphasis on politically sensitive case studies (e.g., Allison, 1971), studies focusing on the patterns and processes of selected subsystems over time (e.g., Baldrige, 1971; Tushman, 1974), or on more variable oriented organizational research that captures more of the emergent organizational level processes (e.g., careers, growth, influence). Leadership, for instance, should be considered differently from its current micro orientation (e.g., Fiedler, Vroom). Selznick's (1957) institutional leadership, Katz and Kahn's (1966) higher level leadership processes, and Hollander and Julian's (1969) influence-leadership perspective became more appropriate leadership perspectives. Nemeth's (1972) critique of and suggestions for the prisoners dilemma research, Chertkoff's (1973) process model of bargaining, and Burnams' (1973) suggestions for coalition research are appropriate





directions for content areas important to a political perspective.

This political orientation ought to take advantage of as many perspectives on the process as possible. An obvious source of ideas, both theoretically and empirically, can be taken from political science. While political scientists have been typically interested in affairs of nations, normative theory, and relations of governments to their people (Kaufman, 1965; Dahl, 1970), a few have indicated interest in "private governments" and political behavior inside organizations (e.g., Wildavsky, 1964; Lindblom and Braybrooke, 1963; Long, 1966; March, 1962; Lakoff, 1972). This interest has been especially active in recent years as some political scientists have found utility in integrating political analysis with organizational theory (e.g., Downs, 1967; Zald, 1970; Allison, 1971; Wamsley and Zald, 1973). Easton's (1965) work on a process oriented systems model of political behavior is particularly appropriate given the perspective presented here.

Of particular importance to a political model is the analysis of power, power relationships, and power structures. These concerns are very primitively developed even in political science (Frey, 1973; March, 1966; Verba, mimeo). While there have been descriptive studies of power and political dynamics, the power literature has been atheoretical, internally inconsistent, and contradictory (March, 1966). The most basic definitional and operational issues remain to be resolved (e.g., Patchen, 1974). Since the operationalization of concepts is interdependent with theory development, the importance of developing micro-political theory is of immediate importance for the development of a more explicit political perspective on organizations.

With respect to theory, the political perspective highlights the importance of a range of areas that are currently on the periphery of organization studies. It further directs organizational research to be sensitive to organization level emergent processes. Methodologically it forces the analyst interested in organizational behavior to take a more macro approach to the variables studied and to be open to a wide range of methods to capture the behavior under study.



### Applications implications

In the applications arena the political perspective offers a counterpoint to the more typical organizational framework. The political approach puts conditions on the cooperative paradigm which apply to industrial organizations and even more so to public and non-profit organizations. As organizations become more internally complex and as the rate of change of technical and economic environments increases, the internal dynamics of organizations become more important to understand; the importance of this political framework is thereby heightened. To conclude this paper a number of application areas will be discussed with the political perspective in mind.

### Organization development

With the political perspective the usefulness of organization development (OD) is much more problematic and limited than is typically admitted. OD has developed with a set of assumptions and values of men and organizations that must be modified if the political perspective has merit. While Friedlander and Brown (1974) define OD in broad terms, this paper will take OD as the area of concern that has grown from NTL and related developments over the past 20 years (see Hornstein et al., 1971). Much of the work of OD has been centered on individual or small group methods as the primary lever of change (Friedlander and Brown, 1974). For example, Blake and Mouton (1964), Argyris (1962, 1972, 1973), and Beckhard (1969) focus on organizational change through individual and group methods. This individual directed approach does not in general fit with the more structurally oriented political approach. If the process model holds, organizations are always in a state of flux quite independent of change agents. With the major exception of top levels in the organization (if there are any), organizing, as previously described, runs mostly independently of the individuals involved. That is, organizational dynamics result from inter-unit and environmental pressures.

An example of the individual-small group approach can be taken from Argyris' work. Argyris (1973) emphasizes competence, usually learned in the lab, as the major lever for planned change. Yet the very stability of what he terms World A even after individual interventions



(e.g., Harrison, 1962) can be traced to a lack of awareness of basic structural and political processes which the values and perspectives of laboratory training actually encourage. This kind of effect, where organizational processes are ignored to the detriment of the change effort, is graphically illustrated in Warwick's (1972) discussion of the state department case (Argyris, 1967). At the organization level, a more effective approach to change may be a sequencing of individual, structural, and strategic actions after systematic diagnosis of the clients task environments. This does not say that lab training is irrelevant, but does de-emphasize its blanket utility for organization level change. A more effective training program, particularly for high level individuals, could focus on economic, financial, and strategic training and less solely on interpersonal competence.

It follows from the political perspective and subsystem dynamics that assumptions of individual trust, openness, and commitment, while possibly appropriate at the within-group level, are very inappropriate at the organization level of analysis. If so, then many traditional OD methods become questionable. For instance, where team building may well be effective within a sub-unit, these new skills and the values associated with the skills may be quite counterproductive at the organizational level where the various subsystems vie for scarce resources given their frequently divergent interests. Again, with the political perspective, organizational equilibrium is a function of power and influence differentials with overall organizational effectiveness as one of many competing system goals. The case study of Lewicki and Alderfer (1973) dealing with an abortive union-management intervention graphically described union-management posturing for their own ends, their basic goal differences, and the implications of a lack of a political sensitivity of the change agents.

It is assumed here that if the change agents were able to understand the union-management processes they would have used a different set of interventions. In a similar vein, what happens when the change agent cannot work from the top as most OD theorists suggest (e.g., Beckhard, 1969)? What if there is no organizational summit and the organization is instead ruled by a committee or board of conflicting interests? The OD literature





is equivocal here. The case reported by Rubin et al. (1973) documents the difficulties and consequences of extending the conventional wisdom to medical centers where deans quite frequently have very little real power (e.g., Hagedorn and Dunlop, 1971). The political perspective provides an alternative framework for conceptualizing, diagnosing, and then making the strategic decisions for maximum leverage.

Much recent work on OD emphasizes the importance of viewing the organization as a system (e.g., Beckhard, 1969, Schein, 1970, Beer and Huse, 1972). While this is exactly what is argued for here, a systems perspective that ignores the political implications of systems logic is severely limited. Indeed, the Beer and Huse (1972) and Beckhard (1969) articles are good examples of the conceptual blinders that come from the traditional way of viewing organizations. They both see organizations as "open systems" that wait to be systematically manipulated. However, in these open systems internal processes operating to resist OD interventions are either ignored or discussed only within the superordinate goal framework. It is perhaps because of these kinds of blinders that the results of OD technology have been equivocal (see Bowers, 1973; Strauss, 1972; Back, 1972). Indeed, Bowers observes that simple feedback of data was more effective than all other OD techniques in his longitudinal study of organization change. Similarly, King (1974) has demonstrated that the results of an OD program were due not to the intervention itself, but rather to the high expectations of the individuals involved. The widespread use and enthusiasm for OD techniques in the face of only equivocal external evaluation speak for the influence of OD values and beliefs and what King (1974) has called expectation effects.

The political perspective takes the notions of interpersonal competence, organizational trust, and openness as inappropriate basics for organizational change. Given a political perspective, of particular importance is a systematic diagnosis of the clients' place in the organizational system, his relationships with the task environment (both internal and external) and previous organizational precedent (or history). With systematic diagnosis, strategic decisions incorporating some combination of structural and behavioral levers can be made (Friedlander and Brown, 1974; Tushman, 1974). The particulars of what Friedlander and Brown





(p. 322) term multifaceted O.D. remain for future research. The political perspective contributes most to the diagnosis phase of the intervention. While training may be important, it is more likely to concentrate on bargaining and managerial strategic decision making skills and less solely on interpersonal competence. Traditional OD may well be successful in many industrial or otherwise simple situations (e.g., small organization, stable environment, simple tasks), yet if the political perspective has merit, then the generalizability of OD to other kinds of organizations will be limited unless broadened to include the implications of organizations as both political and complex systems.

### M.I.S. and organizational decision making

Very much related to organizational change is the work being done on the design and implementation of management information systems (M.I.S.). Indeed, the introduction of an M.I.S. can be seen as a special case of organizational change. As Downs (1967), Crozier (1964), and Hickson et al. (1974) note, information and the control of organizational uncertainty are important variables influencing political processes. If this is so, then the implications for openness and better, more open, communication become unclear at the organizational level. This effect has been well documented by Wilensky (1967) and Baldrige (1971). Further, if information is a sensitive political variable and if groups work to maximize their control or influence on information flow, then M.I.S. interventions become difficult propositions. Sapolsky (1972) has studied the introduction and use of a M.I.S. in the Navy. The newly developed PERT system was used by the special projects office not for its content, but as a powerful political tool in the rapid development of the Polaris system. Stabell (1974) has shown that the introduction of an M.I.S. in the financial department of a bank was seen not for its task usefulness but as a way of being monitored by other managers. It was therefore not used as intended. Given the sensitivity of information, the resistance and misuse of M.I.S. follows naturally. The political perspective highlights the importance of the diagnosis of the political implications of information and information monitoring before introduction and even design of M.I.S.



Related to the M.I.S. discussion is the area of organizational decision making. If decision making is divided into operational (i.e., linear programming), managerial (internally oriented), and strategic (externally oriented) decision making (Bowman, 1974), then the political approach has particular use for the latter two categories. Strategic decision making from the political perspective looks at goals for the organization as defined by a dominant coalition (as opposed to goals of the organization). The problem then shifts to the development of these dominant coalitions over different issue areas. With the approach developed here, dominant coalitions and strategic decisions can be seen as proxies for the output of more basic activities occurring inside the organization. It is to these processes that the political approach focuses on. While economic, financial, legal, and technical considerations impose constraints on these strategic decisions, the decisions themselves are the result of intergroup bargaining and individual predispositions at the dominant coalition level. It follows that these goals are not necessarily the traditional goals of profit maximization. Evidence in support of this approach to strategic decision making is overwhelming. No studies have supported what Lindbloom (1963) has termed synoptic (i.e., rational) decision making. Indeed, Lindbloom and Braybrooke (1963) and Wildavsky (1964) argue that synoptic decision making is impossible in all but the most simple decisions. Stagner (1969), Hage and Dewar (1973), Mintzberg (1973), Baldrige (1971), and Allison (1971) have all reported either case or empirical studies that give direct support to this political approach to strategic decision making.

Managerial decision making can be seen as analogous to strategic decision making (indeed, the distinction between the two is hazy). Here too the evidence for internal organizational decisions also strongly supports the political viewpoint. Examples include Wildavsky's (1964) study of budgetary decisions, Baldrige's (1971) description of decision making at N.Y.U., Bucher's (1970) description of medical schools, and Hickson et al.'s (1974) study of decision making in industrial organizations. The examples cited above dealing with M.I.S. also fit here.

Implications of this view of organizational decision making are many. For instance, organization-wide decision systems at the managerial



level are probably less appropriate (in terms of intended vs. actual use) than individual or small group tailored decision systems. This view is congruent with Hall's (1972) observation of the lack of use of management decision systems and would support a Meador-Ness (1974) type of tailored approach. In terms of long-range planning, the political approach emphasizes the importance of establishing, protecting, and expanding what Bowman (1974) terms an organizational niche through tracking and acting on the organization's technical and economic environment. Similarly, units within the organization can be expected to increase their power by establishing contingent dependencies with other sub-units in the organization (Hickson et al., 1974). The training of managers in terms of ways of thinking about organizational behavior in strategic terms is also appropriate given this political approach.

### Organization design

Organization structure and design has received considerable attention given its direct applications potential. Evidence strongly suggests that economic and technical environments impose constraints on organizational structure (at least if performance is an issue). While these constraints were taken as quite severe (e.g., Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967), recent evidence suggest that these constraints are broad. Pugh (1974) and Reinman (1973) suggest that organizations can perform equally well (at least in the short run) in a given environment with a number of different organizational structures. This non-deterministic view of organization and structure fits well with the political approach. If the environments pose constraints then structural decisions become another set of important strategic decisions (Child, 1972). A good example of this kind of strategic decision making is Chandler's (1962) history of the decentralization decisions in a number of large American firms and their consequences in terms of long run criteria.

In the more explicitly design area the political approach raises questions similar to those raised in the O.D. discussion. The design suggestions (e.g., Galbraith, 1974) often lack a sensitivity to their political consequences. For example, if the political approach has merit, then Lawrence and Lorsch's (1967) ideas on confrontation as



the most effective strategy for reducing conflict becomes strained. If the conflict is between two differentiated areas, then the probability of the managers openly exchanging accurate information and open feelings in the process of conflict resolution is small. A mutual orientation requires a binding superordinate goal. Further, the integrator in a political system becomes more of an arbitrator or mediator between groups. The characteristics of an effective neutral may not be those described by Lawrence and Lorsch (pp. 54-74). The same kind of argument can be made for the potential lack of applicability of Likert's (1961) linking pin concept. Finally, Galbreith's (1974) discussion of matrix organizations does not speak to the potential problems of subgroup stereotyping and intergroup processes except in terms of the integrator.

#### Reward and pay system

At a different level than structure and design is the issue of pay as a motivational device. Lawler (1971) has done much work in this area and serves as a good example of how his assumptions of organizations affect not only his application suggestions but even his motivational model. Take the issue of pay secrecy vs. pay openness. Lawler summarized much of the literature on pay and its relationships to organizational effectiveness. His thrust is that pay should be tied to performance and that organizations should try to match their pay system to their structure. A particular observation made by Lawler, on the basis of empirical work and his normative orientation, is that pay secrecy is detrimental to organizational effectiveness. He writes: "the organizations could then move to complete pay openness, but only when it has, as a whole, become more democratic with high levels of trust between supervisors, subordinates, and peers (p. 257)." From the political perspective there are two problems here. Organizations, as constrained systems, are not typically "democratic with high levels...of trust..." This is certainly true on an organizational level. There is a more critical difference, however, in the conception of pay and its use. Lawler sees pay as the organizational reward to employees. If public, then all could see the relationship between pay and performance. This open policy of rewarding the successful and punishing (i.e., withholding) the less







successful would then decrease invidious and inaccurate comparisons and serve as a motivating organizational system. The political perspective sees pay not only as a reward to individuals, but just as importantly, as a tool for management. Pay can be conceived of as a tool used to couple the individual or group to management values or directives (Gruenfeld, 1972). Bonuses given selectively are an integral tack of the managerial subsystem to tie significant others to their line (Tausky, 1970, pp. 83-86). To make pay public would destroy this bargaining tool. (While this is not recommended, it nevertheless is real.)

Part of the problem which results in his sometimes misleading propositions is Lawler's view of organizational processes. His motivational model is also part of the problem. Given his psychological orientation, organizational processes such as career decisions, local rationality, and the like, do not enter into the model. As such, its organization level generalizability is limited. (Graen's 1969 extension of this motivation model is appropriate given the importance of organizational level decisions.) Very much related to the pay issue are the areas of promotion and assessment. The political perspective makes these decisions, especially at the post-hire level, much less rational and programmable than reported by MacKinnon (1974). Since many goals are operating simultaneously at the different sub-units, decisions of promotion and assessment can be seen as political decisions with varying criteria applied by the different areas for the different levels. Burns and Stalker (1966), Dalton (1959), and Pfeffer (1973) all discuss promotion and assessment in political terms.

### Leadership

The last topic to be discussed here is leadership. Given the political orientation and the organization level perspective, leadership can be viewed as concerned with the adjudication of interests and with strategic decisions more than with the traditional concerns of initiation, consideration, or motivation. This macro approach has been discussed by Selznick (1949). His institutional leader is not an operational manager but rather<sup>is</sup> viewed as a politician, a political broker, distributing status



and influence to further what he (or the dominant coalition) sees as the organization's mission. This view is very similar to Katz and Kahn's (1966) origination and interpolation of structure leadership types.

Leadership at these levels has not been studied except in case studies (e.g., Baldrige, 1971; Allison, 1971). Given the process-political orientation, alternative leadership frameworks could be generated from Hollander and Julian's (1969) influence perspective or from Blau's (1964) exchange perspective. Like the pay and motivation literature, much of the leadership literature does not generalize to the organizational level of analysis either because the level studied is individual or intra-group (e.g., the participation literature) or it ignores organizational level processes (e.g., Fiedler, 1967). For example, in Vroom and Yetten's (1974) normative leadership model, issues of careers, competition between groups, differential perception, and other political kinds of processes are not considered. These considerations could well alter their decision paths. This does not say that their model is not useful, only that it could be more complete with the addition of these kinds of variables. An example of a more complete model is Graen's (1969) work on motivation which explicitly takes organizational issues into account.

Finally, the political perspective can be seen as an integrative framework for the diverse work done on the stimulation of creative leadership or organizational innovation. If the innovation is more than a routine change, and if the implementation of the innovation involves the marshalling of resources and decision support, then the usefulness of the political approach is clear. Studies by Hage and Dewar (1973) and Normann (1971) in industrial organizations and Davis (1967) in the Navy, as well as the theoretical article by Wilson (1966), support the utility of this political approach to innovation. The notion of product champion as described by Davis (1967) and Achilladelis et al. (1971) can be seen as good examples of the utility of political skills in recognizing and pushing innovation in the face of organizational inertia and resistance. The obvious implication is that creative leadership skills should include political skills for dealing with internal and external units.



## Conclusion

The political perspective presented here is an attempt to begin to develop an organization level framework that is consistent with systems thinking and the work on organization-environment relations. The development of this view has been presented in an historical-developmental sequence which recognizes that the dynamics of conflict and power should be brought into organizational level analyses. The implications of this kind of framework are many; some have been discussed here. This viewpoint is not meant to replace but rather compliment current conceptions of organizational behavior. Indeed the elaboration of this framework can be seen to be an integrating device for the now isolated, it not divergent, psychological (e.g., pay, motivation) and sociological (e.g., structure, environment) perspectives on organizations. The need for an explicit framework is great, especially as analysts become involved in a wide range of organizations where traditional conceptions and methods do not work well (e.g., Rubin et al., 1973). The explicit framework remains to be developed, both conceptually and empirically. With all the difficulties involved, it is the argument of this paper that the shift will be well worth the effort since it will bring organization studies more in line with organizational reality--a benefit both to those interested in thinking about and those working with organizations.



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